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FROM AIT KAOHSIUNG BRANCH OFFICE

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SUBJECT: National Tainan University Campus Becomes Flash Point in Tainan Mayoral Election

Ref: TAIPEI 3900

¶1. On September 12 Taiwan's Ministry of Education approved National Tainan University's expansion plans on the condition that the school return two thirds of its campus land that is located in the heart of the city. The Ministry intends to take the land in exchange for the monies needed by the school to open a campus outside the city. School authorities complain that there is no precedent for national universities to return campus land for the purpose of funding an expansion.

¶2. The National Tainan University, which was founded a hundred years ago in Tainan City as a normal university, was planning to expand its current campus to additional land it has acquired in Chiku, Tainan County, without relinquishing any of its facilities in Tainan City. The University conceived of the plan not as the sort of relocation now being forced on it by the Ministry of Education, but as an expansion that would add a branch campus to accommodate students outside the city.

¶2. In support of National Tainan University's expansion plan, KMT Tainan mayoral candidate Chen Jung-sheng in conjunction with KMT and PFP city council caucuses, initiated a signature drive on September 20, urging the Ministry of Education to change its policy on the return of two-thirds of National Tainan University's city campus lands. KMT Legislator Wang Yi-ting said she would ask the Ministry of Education to review the plan. Wang also declared she would propose to boycott the education budget in the legislative session. More than ten thousand Tainan citizens participated in the signature drive.

¶3. The willingness of Tainan citizens to petition stems from their dissatisfaction with the Executive Yuan's decision on the city campus issue. They noted that President Chen Shuibian is a native of Tainan but his administration has failed to support the city and protect its major educational asset. Citizens see a lack of equity since National Tainan University is the only national university that, upon making plans to expand, has been required by authorities to return campus lands as part of a "forced relocation."

¶4. Facing criticism from the KMT opposition, Tainan Mayor Hsu Tain-tsair said he has been negotiating with the central government authorities to preserve the school's city campus and that he has confidence that the school would not move out of Tainan City or its campus be traded for the expansion budget. Local political observers say the campus issue has become a flash point in the upcoming mayoral election in Tainan (see reftel).

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